

Geography 350

The Global Food System

Office: MS 325C

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Course Description

In this course we will explore the modern system of food production and consumption, with emphasis on the development of industrial farming and agri-businesses, the globalization of the food system, and food security. We will consider the geographical issues of scale, distribution, culture, and human-environment interactions, primarily through the lenses of political ecology and historical geography.

Course goals

1. To provide greater understanding of:
 - a. The origins and development of modern industrial agriculture
 - b. Where our food supply comes (intersecting global food commodity chains)
 - b. The geographical extent and complexity of global food networks
 - c. Some of the political, economic, cultural, environmental, and nutritional implications of the industrialization of food and agriculture
2. To develop awareness of our own diets as parts of a global system
3. To provide historical context for development of global food trade and agricultural processes

Required Texts

Magdoff, Foster, and Buttel, eds., *Hungry for Profit: The Agribusiness Threat to Farmers, Food and the Environment*, Monthly Review Press, 2000

Weis, *The Global Food Economy: The Battle for the Future of Farming*, Zed Books/Fernwood, 2007

Grading and Assignments

Weekly Journal	40 pts, 15 wk	560 pts (56%)
Film analysis or book review		140 pts (14%)
Debate & position paper		300 pts (30%)

Since this is a seminar-type class, you are expected to be present and to participate energetically in all class discussions and activities. More than 2 absences will seriously effect evaluation of your work.

And as always...

PLAGIARISM: It is unethical, and against university rules, to use other people's work – **including all web-sourced information** - without attribution or citation; if you use it, cite it. Failure to do so will result in an "F" for the assignment, at minimum, and for the course if warranted. It is our policy to check paper and essay work against WWW-accessible sources.

We may require you to retain and provide all drafts, edits, and intermediate versions of your work. Failure to provide this requested documentation can mean an “F” for the course.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS: The Geography Department is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with documented physical disabilities or documented learning disabilities. University policy states that it is the responsibility of students with documented disabilities to contact instructors during the first week of each semester to discuss appropriate accommodations to ensure equity in grading, classroom experiences, and outside assignments.

Assignment descriptions

A. Weekly Journal

This comprises the bulk of your work for the semester. It consists of 4 parts:

1. Your response to the questions I will hand out on each week’s readings – and any additional reactions, responses, or comments you have
2. 3 to 5 of your own questions for the week’s discussion of the readings, and a brief explanation of why you think they’re important or interesting
3. A brief discussion of your choice of :
 - i. A food item you experienced & researched
 - ii. An aspect of the food system (preferably from the week’s readings) that particularly interested you
 - iii. An article, news item, or blogpost you encountered that week (please include a copy of the item being discussed)
4. A brief (paragraph or so) description of the status of your understanding of what you’re learning about the food system, industrial ag, life as a food consumer, etc. Confusion is a perfectly acceptable status, as long as you explain why you’re confused and what about.

Each of these entries will be worth 10 pts, each week (40 pts total). I will collect your journals periodically throughout the semester. Please keep up with them, as the quality of your entries will have direct consequences on your experience of class time and the material. Please type as much of this as possible

All journals must have a Table of Contents/Checklist for all parts 1-4. **NUMBER** your journal pages and indicate on your checklist where you’re discussing what. Here’s one way to do this:

Wk	Topic/Reading Assignment	4	Pp
2	Overviews/ GFE 1-24, 44-46; HFP “Overview”		
	1) Dr R Qs	√	2-3
	2) My Qs	√	4
	3) Food item (Cheerios)	√	5-6
	4) Status paragraph	√	6

B. Film Analysis or Book Review

A short (3-5 page) paper presenting a considered analysis of List of pre-approved suggestions will be posted to WebCampus shortly. We will be reading or watching excerpts of a lot of these in class. For any other choices, *please check with me first*.

C. The Debate

The debate will take place in 2 parts, on the last day of class and the final exam session. All team members must write a position paper (6-8 pages suggested) that explains and justifies the position to which they've been assigned, whether or not they actually agree with it. This is about making a reasoned, thoughtful, persuasive argument *backed up by evidence*. You are striving to make a strong, not strident, case for your side. Your paper should anticipate the other side's arguments and attempt to refute them – with evidence.

The Moderator will write a paper that a) summarizes and briefly discusses the salient argument of each side; b) presents a well-developed set of questions s/he plans to raise in the debate; and c) justifies the questions with reference to the issues they confront.

*All papers **must** contain specific references to course materials and any outside research used in support of position statements of issue questions.*

For Part 1, scheduled for the last day of class (Monday, Dec 12), I will assign you a side or the moderator role. For Part 2, you get to pick whatever side or role you want to represent in our final, less formalized discussion.

Course Plan 1.0

Week/Date	Topic
1/ 8.29	Course Intro
8.31	Film: Food, Inc
2/ 9.5	Labor Day - no class
9.7	Outline issues facing GFS, based on readings & film

Segment I – Historical roots of the modern GFS

3/ 9.12 & 9.14	Origins of the modern system: traditional agriculture; colonial production and trade
4/ 9.19 & 9.21	Early mechanization and soil 'improvements' Film: The Grapes of Wrath
5/ 9.26 & 9.28	The industrialization of agriculture in the postwar US; emergence of the grain-livestock complex Film: End of Suburbia
6/ 10.3 & 10.5	Concentration and consolidation; industrialized food production

Segment II – Global agro-food systems in the post-war era: 'North' v 'South'?

- 7/ 10.10 3 agricultural strategies in the developing world: the 'marginals' (M)
 & 10.12 The 'powerhouses i' and the Green Revolution (W)
- 8/ 10.17 The powerhouses ii (M)
 & 10.19 SAPs (W)
 Film: Life and Debt
- 9/ 10.24 Global food politics: trade, regulation, subsidies, global integration
 & 10.26

Segment III – Where we are and what we eat now

- 10/10.31 Industrial agriculture and the environment
 & 11/2
- 11/11.7 "Hedgerow to Hedgerow" – Corn
 & 11.9 Film: King Corn
- 12/11.14 Fast Food Nation: CAFOS, scary potatoes, and flavor factories
 & 11.16 Film: The Future of Food
- 13/11.21 Biotechnology and GMOs
 & 11.23 Film: The World According to Monsanto,

BOOK/FILM ANALYSIS DUE

Segment IV – Where are we going? The future of food and farming

- 14/11.28 Is Organic the answer? Can we all be locavores?
 & 11.30
- 15/12.5 Sustainable Intensification: "Save and Grow"
 & 12.7 Envisioning a global 'level playing field?'
- FOOD JOURNAL DUE (W)**
- 16/12.12 Debate, Pt 1 (M)
 12.14 Dead Day – No class
- DEBATE PAPER DUE (W) – hard copy in my dept box or under my ofc door**
NO PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER 4 PM WED 12/14
- 12.16 Debate, Pt 2; final Discussion
- NOTE:** currently scheduled for Friday, Dec 16 from 6-8 pm